

Keep pressure on state lawmakers to fund basic education

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The state Supreme Court should keep the pressure on the Legislature to solve education inequities of its overreliance on voter-approved local levies.

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)

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THIS week, the Legislature will file its own progress report on its efforts to get back into the state Supreme Court's good graces on education reform and funding.

The court would be right to take a dim view of the Legislature failing to fully fund education, fully 10 months since the court held the state in contempt. The state still relies too much on voter-approved local levies to pay for basic education.

No question lawmakers made impressive progress this year, adding about \$1.3 billion in new education funding, including class-size reductions in K-3.

But the court, in its 2012 McCleary ruling, made clear the state's reliance on local levies must stop because it creates intolerable inequities between property-rich and -poor districts. Voters in wealthier districts, such as Bellevue, lavish resources on their schools that more rural districts, such as Prosser, can only dream of.

Still, the justices can find some encouragement in the herculean efforts of a bipartisan group of senators, who met tirelessly through the legislative session. They hammered out a levy-reform approach that addresses many prickly challenges, including how to equalize students' educational quality across the state, adequately compensate teachers who work in higher-cost areas and still allow local voters to provide financial resources for things that are not part of basic education.

Such reforms could go a long way to improving disappointing outcomes. For instance, only 55.8 percent of the state's eighth-graders passed the math portion of the

Measurement of Student Progress in 2014, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The senators agreed on the price tag — about \$3.5 billion — but not on where that should come from. One proposal would increase property taxes for some. Another was to impose a capital-gains tax on wealthy individuals. Because of the lateness of the agreement, the proposal never made it out of committee.

Time is short, and the state's students cannot wait until the next legislative session begins in January. While speculation runs rampant about what penalties the court might impose, this is not the time for drastic measures that are disruptive to state government and its services.

Rather, the high court should keep the pressure on the Legislature and the governor to solve this problem in the interim — in a special session, if necessary.

Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, Blanca Torres, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).